

THE 19th CENTURY WATER LAW RIGHTS TO THE RIVER



How has the Colorado system of water allocation evolved?



By the mid 1870s population and agricultural crops expanded, and so did the need for larger ditches. The increase in demand on limited water supply caused friction between communities.

"...The citizens of Greeley and vicinity have been leaders in Colorado. First to experience the necessities, they have been at the front in urging needed reforms, and in these they have been notably successful."
— David Boyd, 1897



As the need for water increased, elaborate structures were built to regulate water flow. Shown here is the Larimer Ditch headgate, late 1800s.

Colorado was the first western state to adopt the system of “prior appropriation” based on a simple concept: first in time, first in right. The first individual, group or corporation who files for the water, is the first in line to use the water.

1850-60

The Cache la Poudre Valley begins to be settled and farmed; over 30 small canals and ditches are constructed.

1870

Union Colony (now Greeley) is established, and extensive farming and irrigation begins. Greeley canals #2 and #3 are built.

1874

Severe drought produces conflict between Fort Collins and Greeley. Greeley residents demand recognition of their prior right to Poudre water.

How has the beneficial use of water affected people's lives in Northern Colorado?



Windsor Lake offered recreational opportunities soon after its construction in 1882.



As demand grew, storage facilities and structures such as the headgates of the Terry Lake Reservoir shown here were developed.

Water is considered to be beneficially used if it is used to accomplish, without waste, the purpose for which the appropriation is lawfully made. These uses include domestic, agricultural, industrial, municipal and recreational.

1876

Colorado Constitution incorporates the concept of prior appropriation as the basis of state water law, and emphasizes the beneficial use of water.

1879-81

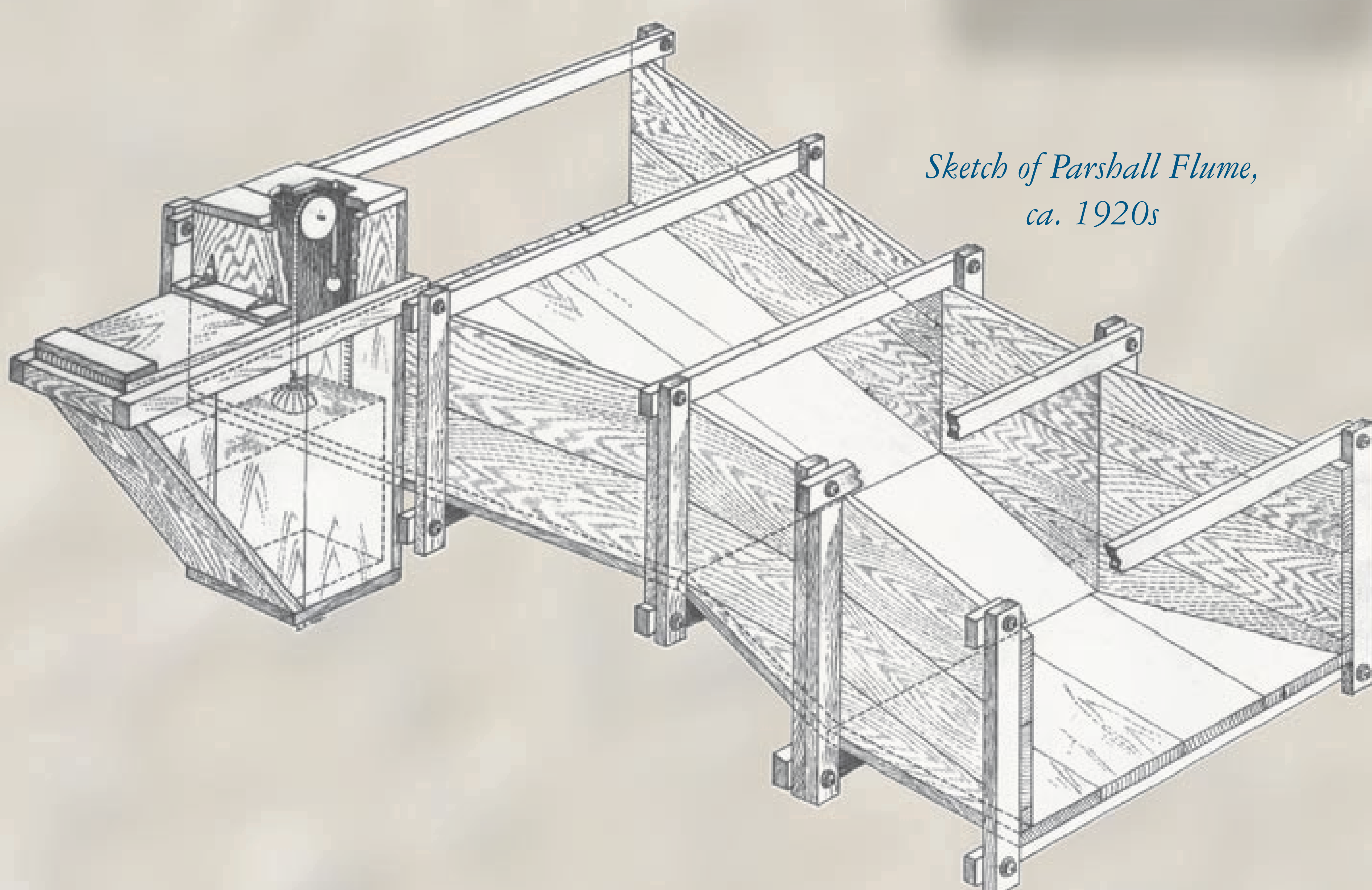
Irrigation Acts are passed by the state legislature creating water districts, water divisions, and the office of State Engineer.

Measuring Water

Shown to the right is Ralph Parshall next to the flume that bears his name. Parshall, a professor at the Colorado Agricultural College (CSU) worked on the Poudre to design what became the standard tool for measuring water. Water measurement is critical in regulating and enforcing the water laws of Colorado.



Sketch of Parshall Flume, ca. 1920s



Flumes were required to accurately measure water flow. This flume was on Greeley Canal #2.

